

Goal of SDWA: Keep prime waterfowl hunting at its best

Brookings Register

As members of the young South Dakota Waterfowl Association see it, the picture is clear:

South Dakota has some of the best waterfowl hunting in the country.

If too many hunters disturb waterfowl, waterfowl find another place to live.

The state Legislature decides how many people can hunt each year by limiting the number of nonresident licenses.

Commercial interests want to offer more nonresident licenses to attract visitors and their money to South Dakota.

The South Dakota Waterfowl Association (SDWA) was created to lobby legislators to keep the number of nonresident waterfowl licenses where it is, so the hunting remains good.

“We want the quality – that’s the No. 1 thing,” said Spencer Vaa, a Brookings resident, Waterfowl Association member and former 38-year employee of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.

“We want to maintain quality for the resident hunters and the people who are fortunate enough to draw a permit from out of state. How are we going to do that? No. 1, this is probably the main reason we formed, was to maintain the current number of nonresident hunting licenses. We think there’s enough nonresidents coming here.”

In February 2010, Brookings resident Chuck Dieter initiated the formation of the waterfowl association, which now has about 150 members. Members pay a \$25 fee, good for three years.

SDWA considers itself a grassroots organization. It has no lobbyist, though Martin Hesby, Brookings resident and board member, said members have talked about hiring one. Instead, they’ve decided for now that members are most effective when they contact their state representatives directly. When a proposal comes along in the state Legislature, SDWA calls up its members and urges them to tell their representatives how they feel about the change.

Waterfowl history

In the late 1940s, South Dakota banned all nonresidents from hunting waterfowl here because the state had leased much of the good hunting land, locking out residents.

But in 1968, the U.S. House and Senate amended a funding bill for the Oahe Irrigation Project (a failed project that would have provided supplemental irrigation water to farms in the James River Valley) to say that South Dakota would not get money for this project unless the state repealed its ban on nonresident waterfowl hunting.

Vaa said the state began by allowing about 1,000 licenses each year, and the number has risen steadily since then.

Not tied to the land

In recent years, Vaa said, commercial interests have been pushing the state to allow more and more licenses to nonresidents because, like any visitor, those hunters will spend money in South Dakota.

The problem is, ducks and geese are not like pheasants or other upland game, which generally live their entire lives in a one-mile area.

“Ducks and geese, they might have nested up in Saskatchewan where I was up last week hunting waterfowl, and they’re going to end up in Mexico or South America. So, I mean, they don’t stay in one spot like a pheasant does,” Vaa said. “If you hunt ducks and geese too hard, they’re going to pack up and leave. So, if you’ve got too much hunting pressure, you’re going to have lousy hunting.”

Supply vs. demand

South Dakota issues up to 6,000 waterfowl hunting licenses each year to nonresidents. These are valid for three days, 10 days or all season. All allow the nonresident to hunt in a certain region of the state. Some are for public land, others for private and some good for both.

According to the licensing office of S.D. Game, Fish and Parks, in three of five categories this year, applications for nonresident waterfowl hunting licenses were higher than the number of licenses issued: 349 were requested for zone 00A, which issues 250; 5,458

were requested for zone 00B, which issues 3,725; and 825 were requested for zone 00Y, which issues 500.

Zone 00X can issue 1,500 but never sells out. In the fifth zone, 11A, only 25 licenses can be granted and 19 requests were received in the first round of application.

SDWA has not pushed to decrease the current number of licenses, members said, only to maintain that number.

Other goals

Beside limiting the number of licenses, SDWA members aim to: Keep waterfowl hunting from becoming increasingly commercialized, recruit youth into the sport, support wetland and grassland conservation, and work with GF&P on waterfowl issues.

South Dakota has lost more than 1 million acres of grassland in the past 10 years, Vaa said, because it is more profitable for farmers to grow corn and soybeans there. So, SDWA members are encouraged to write letters to their congressmen at the state and federal levels, asking for a "solid conservation part of the Farm Bill."

"If I guy wants to put some of his land into grass and retain wetlands, let him do it at a decent price, so he can compete with what he gets for cash rent," Vaa said.

However, wetland and grassland conservation is the primary goal of Ducks Unlimited, which puts much of its money into easements, while it is a secondary goal of SDWA. SDWA is not a money-raising organization, Dieter said.

SDWA doesn't like commercialization but would rather see a hunter build a relationship with the individual landowner. Otherwise, large tracts of land get locked up for the select few who pay to hunt them, members said.

Waiting

Oct. 18, SDWA held its annual meeting and wild game feed at the Old Sanctuary in Brookings. It is always recruiting new members, and anyone interested could contact Dieter at 690-6351 or charles.dieter@gmail.com; or mail a \$25 membership fee with their contact information to SDWA, P.O. Box 8381, Brookings, 57006.

Meanwhile, members are waiting to see what discussion will be raised about nonresident hunting licenses during the coming Legislative session.

"There's always a push, every year, to raise that number up," Vaa said. So far, the resident sportsmen have beaten it back. I'm sure this year, when the Legislature meets, it'll come up again – it always does."

Norbeck project withstands latest legal challenge

Rapid City Journal

The federal courts have once again affirmed logging operations in the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve under a project by the U.S. Forest Service intended to diversity wildlife habitat, reduce the chance of catastrophic fires and fight the mountain pine beetle.

A three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals filed a decision Wednesday, affirming a ruling last January by U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Viken of Rapid City. Viken dismissed a complaint by Friends of the Norbeck and Native Ecosystems Council against the Forest Service and the Norbeck Wildlife Project, which includes timber removal on parts of the 28,000 acres of Forest Service land in the preserve.

In affirming Viken's ruling, the appeals court rejected the contention by the environmental groups that the project was arbitrary, capricious or contrary to the provisions of federal law. The court further agreed with Viken that there were other administrative remedies not exhausted by Friends of the Norbeck before its action in federal court.

The ruling will allow ongoing work in the Norbeck to continue. And that will benefit of the preserve and its wildlife as well as fire prevention efforts and beetle control, Black Hills National Forest supervisor Craig Bobzien said Wednesday.

"I'm really pleased that the courts upheld the project. I think it's an area of highest public interest," Bobzien said. "This is important to the resource and important to the people."

Bobzien said he was "really pleased that the project can proceed to meet those designed objectives benefiting wildlife, fuel reduction and the beetle situation."

Friends of Norbeck spokesman Brian Brademeyer said he was disappointed in the decision but said there were a few positives in the loss. Those included the court's reaffirmation of the public's rightful role in oversight of such projects and its standing to bring legal actions against them, he said.

Brademeyer also said the challenge brought by the environmentalists, beginning with an administrative appeal, helped modify the Norbeck project in beneficial ways to wildlife and the preserve. Those included avoiding logging in areas needing stream crossings for access and prohibiting disturbance during nesting/fawning season.

"The reduced scope of the Norbeck logging project is a positive result for sensitive wildlife species," Brademeyer said.

Brademeyer maintains that the Norbeck project is bad for the preserve and bad for wildlife species there. But he said there is only about a 10 percent chance the environmental groups will ask the full court of appeals to consider the decision of the three-judge panel.

"I think such a further request is unlikely," he said.

Hunting Accident Injures Hayti Teen

KELO-TV

SIOUX FALLS, SD - He's an All-American athlete who survived an incredible accident. And Thursday, a Hayti teenager will set out on the biggest challenge of his life.

Tyler Taschner was hunting two weeks ago when he was hit by a falling tree. It damaged the Hamlin honor student's spine and shocked his family friends.

Tyler truly is All-American. It only takes a look at the Hamlin High School senior's photos to prove it. This 4.0 student who's used to managing his team on the gridiron is now ready to begin a much bigger battle.

"He's just a strong kid, way stronger than I am and through all this you never heard him complain," Craig Taschner, Tyler's brother, said.

For two weeks now, Craig and his family have made this Sanford Hospital Room home, all because of a night of bow-hunting gone wrong.

The one night he happened to be there, an adjacent tree from behind him decided it was old and time to break. He heard it snap and didn't know where it was coming.

"I ducked down close to my knees. You could tell you're paralyzed at that point. I had my phone in my pocket. So I reached in for that and called my dad first. I didn't know what was happening," Tyler said.

Then he started to call the rest of the family because he didn't know whether he was going to make it or not. But he did. He has eight broken ribs. The tree also snapped his spine and stretched his spinal cord. After surgery Tyler has no feeling below his chest.

"You can't feel your abs working but they're working. You can balance yourself. It just feels like a metal plate is up your back holding you straight," Tyler said.

"Sitting here now, it's a tragic situation, but we're all blessed he's still with us," Craig said.

And his brother Craig and the rest of his family aren't the only ones. For days now, classmates and friends have traveled the 100 miles from Hayti just to say hi.

"A lot of classmates, friends, people from other schools," Craig said.

But this night is a farewell of sorts. Tomorrow the family heads to a specialty spine rehab center in Colorado. Doctors have painted a grim picture of the outcome.

"When a spine gets stretched there's not much they can do. But miracles do happen," Tyler said.

And if anyone can maneuver through a challenge to find that miracle, Tyler can.

"It really is up to god to give him strength and healing to come back," Craig said.

Tyler will spend about a month in the Colorado rehab center.

There are sure to be plenty of Tyler's family and friends monitoring his progress. His [Caringbridge website](#) has more than 12,000 hits. It contains information on his progress and community fundraisers to help with medical expenses. Or, you can visit his [Facebook Page](#) as well.

Wyoming public wolf meeting draws strong opinions

RIVERTON -- Ranchers offered their support and conservationists questioned the science about a proposal to lift federal protections for Wyoming's wolf population at a public hearing Tuesday night.

The only U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-sponsored Wyoming wolf hearing drew about 45 people. Approximately 10 voiced their opinions about the management plan drafted by the state and Fish and Wildlife.

The Wyoming plan would designate wolves as predators in most of the state, meaning they could be killed on sight. There would be a smaller trophy game boundary and a "flex-zone," which would seasonally expand the trophy game boundary to allow the wolves to move to other areas to encourage genetic diversity.

Fremont County rancher Jim Hellyer said he had lost cattle to pneumonia and early term abortion brought on by the stress of having wolves in the area. He said he supported the plan.

Fremont County rancher David Vaughan told a similar story about losing livestock in part to stress from predators.

Rancher Darlene Vaughan said the plan offered "great hope" in managing the "experimental, non-essential wolves," and that Fish and Wildlife needed to implement the plan as soon as possible.

The people of Wyoming, livestock and wildlife have been "stoic with the wolf situation but absolutely need relief," she said.

Others questioned the plan.

Sophie Osborn, representing the Wyoming Outdoor Council, said her conservation organization supports Wyoming managing its wolf populations, but its management plan needs to be based on sound science. The general public shouldn't be able to decide when to kill an animal after so much effort and money has gone into elevating population numbers. Instead, she said, Fish and Wildlife should retain power of managing numbers.

Osborn, a wildlife biologist, raised concerns shared by other plan opponents about the flex zone that changes seasonally. Wolves disperse throughout the year, she said. The plan limits potential gene flow between Wyoming wolves and other states' wolves.

Daryle Murphy, representing the Wyoming chapter of the Sierra Club, said the plan was unacceptable and that unregulated killing of wolves shouldn't be allowed. He also took issue with the flex zone. The plan is not based on sound science but political expediency, he said. He also noted the tourism dollars that wolf viewing brings to the state.

Meanwhile, a plan proponent, Don Lewis, talked about the economic influence hunting has in Wyoming, which he said has dwindled since the wolf's reintroduction.

Fish and Wildlife is taking comments on the state's wolf management plan until Jan. 13. It expects to issue a final decision in 2012.

Wisconsin DNR warning hunters about cougar on the loose

MENOMONEE FALLS- A word of caution for hunters from the Department of Natural Resources. They say there's a cougar on the loose. And they want everyone to keep their eyes open.

This is the latest trail snapshot of a cougar roaming around Rusk-Taylor County line - east of Hawkins.

Evidence deer hunters aren't alone this hunting season.

"Cougars you know are stalkers. They would size me up if they're interested in taking me down," Jim Feters, a longtime hunter says. DNR officials say there are only 13 documented cougar attacks on humans in the last 100 years.

But, they are still putting out a word of caution. "If you were to see a cougar, stay in groups, make loud noise. Basically scare the animal

off," says DNR Wildlife Biologist Tim Lizotte. By looking at the photos, DNR officials guess this big cat is a young male.

"Male probably because it's traveling long distances. Our nearest breeding population of cougars is Black Hills of South Dakota," says Lizotte.

That's about 600 miles away. The DNR says, he's now been seen roaming west central and Northern Wisconsin.

He could even be in the Flambeau State Forest or Price County now. "We think they're on the search for good habitat, good territory and also probably looking to where they'll be other cougars," Lizotte says.

That's why some hunters are making sure they keep their eyes open on their big hunting trip.

"A cougar is something to really pay attention too. I mean they are very powerful and they'll take your game from you," John Argenzio, a longtime hunter says. Now, the DNR says not to shoot the cougar. They are a protected species. But, if you do see one to contact the nearest DNR office.

Wyoming looks for ways to try and grow the state's mule deer herd

CHEYENNE -- Hunters, conservationists and state officials are working on plans to boost the Platte Valley mule deer population that has thinned out in recent years.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department hosted a public meeting Monday to discuss the problem and find possible ways to improve the state's management plan for the deer.

The deer are highly coveted targets by hunters in the southeastern part of the state, but the herd's population has fallen below the state's recommendations.

Will Shultz, the department's wildlife biologist in Saratoga, said the herd's population is at about 16,000, which is 4,000 less than the ideal population.

The state officials said there are many reasons for the sluggish numbers including predation, changes to their migration routes and a loss of their habitat due to human and natural causes.

Grant Frost, regional habitat biologist with the department, said the construction of highways and fences are examples of man-made disturbances.

In addition, he said bad weather, fires and forest problems caused by the bark beetle infestation could affect where they can find food.

"Their numbers are limited by their habitat," he said. "It can cause an impact on the deer when they can't be where they want to be."

Frost said possible ways to protect the deer include looking at conservation easements, creating sanctuaries or placing new restrictions on some land use, such as banning off-road vehicles in certain areas.

However, officials said much of their success depends on cooperation with other state and federal agencies and private landowners.

"These (possible solutions) are based on opportunities," Frost said. "We need to have a landowner to partner with us, because Game and Fish owns very little land."

About 25 hunters and local residents attended the meeting that included breakout sessions to allow for public comment and discussion.

Cheyenne resident Bill Brinegar, who has been hunting for about 30 years, said he attended the meeting because he wanted to help make sure the deer's population can stay at a sustainable level.

"I love wildlife, and I don't just want to kill them," he said. "I want (the deer) to be around for a longtime."

Rick King, the department's Laramie wildlife supervisor, said the state will hold similar meetings in other parts of the region.

With the input from the community, he said Game and Fish will develop a set of recommendations that will be presented to the public by late February.

“The plan is for this to be a working document and a framework for us to use,” he said. “It will be a working document that will require constant revisions.”

Yellowstone officials take park's 'vital signs'

Bison and grizzly bear numbers are up, two bright spots in an otherwise dim portrait painted in Yellowstone National Park's third “Natural Resource Vital Signs” report released this week.

“It's nothing to jump to conclusions about in any one area,” said Dan Hottle, park spokesman. “You can look at it in a lot of different ways.”

The reports are produced to help park managers and scientists monitor changes in the condition of the park's natural resources. Park managers pay attention to 25 vital signs that are considered key ecosystem indicators. The report was published by the Yellowstone Center for Resources.

The vital signs are broken into four categories: ecosystem drivers (climate, fire), environmental quality (air and water quality), native species (those listed as threatened or endangered or that may have a significant impact on the park) and stressors (human-introduced agents that can cause change).

Making connections

The report covers many areas and highlights some interconnected problems.

For example, although the catch rates of nonnative lake trout in Yellowstone Lake have been increasing annually since 1994 — 550,000 have been netted and killed so far — lake trout numbers seem to be growing. Native Yellowstone cutthroat trout numbers have continually declined.

The report suggests that the drop in the number of cutthroats may have resulted in 20 percent fewer bald eagle nests with fledglings at Yellowstone Lake. The birds used to feed on cutthroat trout and lake trout, which tend to live in deeper water, are unavailable to eagles.

“Probably our biggest uphill battle is cutthroat trout,” Hottle said.

Broad overview

Hottle emphasized that the publication is not a report card. The park's health is not given a grade based on the factors considered.

But it does give a 19-page overview of the many issues that the park's decision makers are facing.

“It definitely creates a picture,” Hottle said. “But it wasn't meant to be alarmist.”

Here are some of the report's highlights, which mostly reflect data from 2010 and updated with some information from 2011.

Earthquakes: 2010 was an especially active year for earthquakes, with more than 3,000 seismic events detected in the park, including a swarm of 2,400 quakes northwest of Old Faithful, the largest concentration since 1985. The report goes on to note that “energy and groundwater development outside the park, especially in known geothermal areas in Island Park, Idaho, and Corwin Springs, Montana, could alter the functioning of geothermal systems in the park.”

Grizzly bears: The grizzly bear population in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem reached 602 in 2010, the largest number since the recovery program began in 1975. Unfortunately, there were 41 grizzly bear deaths in the ecosystem in 2010. And this summer, grizzly bears killed two hikers in the park in separate incidents.

Despite the ecological challenges concentrated in Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres, or maybe because of them, travelers continue to find the nation's first national park a worthy spot to visit. Visitation records were set in 2009 (3.3 million) and 2010 (3.6 million). Daily visitation during July 2010 averaged 30,900 people, yet the park can accommodate only 14,300 visitors, so many found lodging in towns surrounding the park.

Others are permanently attracted to the area, with the report showing a 50 percent increase between 1990 and 2010 in residents around Yellowstone in portions of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho close to the park.

Many take part in Iowa's 1st dove hunt since 1918

DES MOINES, Iowa— The Iowa Department of Natural Resources says the state's first dove hunting season in nearly a century attracted about 22,000 hunters.

The 70-day season began Sept. 1 and ended Wednesday.

Dove hunting had been outlawed in Iowa since 1918 but was legalized by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Terry Branstad this year.

Efforts to allow the hunting of doves has been emotional in past years, and in 2001 then Gov. Tom Vilsack vetoed a measure approved by the Legislature because he said most Iowans opposed the change.

The DNR says it will conduct a survey of the more than 22,000 people who registered as hunters to determine how many actually took part in the hunt and how many doves they killed.

The deer stand of their dreams

Dennis Anderson, Minneapolis Tribune



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The first two stories of a “deer stand” that Dave Kannegaard (shown) and his son, Chuck, built are enclosed. The third is open and is used more often for bow hunting.

Builders build. Which might be as good an explanation as any for the three-story Dream Deer Stand that Chuck Kannegaard and his dad, Dave, constructed recently on Chuck's property just north of the Twin Cities.

"My dad and I have been building deer stands all my life," Chuck said. "Over the years, we've built stands on property owned by friends who let us hunt their land. Then, eventually, the land was sold or handed down, and we had to find new places to hunt.

"Six months ago, I finally bought a place of my own, a home with 17 acres. So my dad and I thought we'd build another stand, and make this one nice."

Chuck, 40, grew up in St. Paul and learned to hunt there.

"It was very strange," he said. "I learned by hunting squirrels in a neighborhood park. Squirrels and rabbits. It was illegal, I suppose. But I was a kid, and that's how it was.

"Now, anything I can hunt in Minnesota, I hunt."

The owner of a roofing and construction business, Chuck often brings his dad along to jobs "to get him out of his apartment."

But when the deer stand idea came along, Dave instead commuted to Chuck's exurban home and 17 acres to put in a day's hammer-swinging.

"I kind of made things up on this deer stand as I went along," Dave, 65, said the other day. "As you can see, I had to wrap the steps leading to the second story and the steps leading to the third story around a tree. We didn't want to cut the tree down."

Name the deer-stand type, and Chuck and Dave have stood in it at one time or another.

Portables? "Yes."

Ladder stands? "Those, too."

"Years ago, we used 4x4s sunk in the ground to hold up the first bigger, free-standing stands we built," Chuck said. "But over time, they'd tip over.

"Then we started to angle the 4x4s into the ground, and supporting them with wires. That worked pretty well.

"But this big one is anchored with 6x6s. We didn't have to angle them. There's no way it'll blow over."

Sitting on cement blocks, the Kannegaards' Dream Stand rises 7 feet, then another 7 feet, with both levels enclosed. Its outside dimensions are 8x8 feet, and three windows adorn each floor, allowing the father-and-son duo to seal themselves off from the elements -- or not.

"The windows open easily for shooting," Chuck said.

Tongue-and-groove pine covers the stand's interior walls, and cushy office-style swivel chairs on each floor allow the hunters to see in nearly all directions.

Unlike the first two floors, the stand's top floor is open to the weather, with a railing high enough to prevent falls but low enough to allow an archer to draw back a bow.

"The top floor is for bow hunting," Dave said.

And, yes, the stand is wired.

How else to plug in electric heaters?

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Being comfortable while hunting is a notion some who are attracted to the sport find uncomfortable.

As with great painters or other artists, suffering is often considered a prerequisite for success in the field. The late-season waterfowler who squints through driving snow, for instance, anticipating a fresh flight of November birds, relishes -- at least in retrospect -- the prospect of taking home a limit under such harsh conditions.

Similarly, the modern deer hunter who pursues his quarry with a musket in December in well-below-zero temperatures seems somehow more satisfied when success comes than does the hunter who by happenstance fells a trophy buck within the first few minutes of the season.

I found these comments online the other day:

I'm not sure, but it only seems fitting that there is some level of discomfort (wet socks, cold, rain, etc.) while hunting...pretty sure its good luck.

And ...

Good luck or just a reminder of why most people don't do it...either way, a little damp discomfort is a good sign that you're still breathing.

Fair enough ...

Except that few hunters as the years pass reject in favor of a tent the rejuvenating benefits of a warm shack in which to put up their feet at midday, or sleep at night

Fewer still refuse an offer during a frigid hunt of a hot meal, preferring instead a cold sandwich pulled from a snow-wet pack.

And yet:

The driving force behind construction of the Kannegaards' Dream Stand wasn't comfort for comfort's sake.

Instead, it was Chuck's desire to continue hunting with his dad as long as possible.

"I suspect I'll hunt from this land the rest of my life," Chuck said. "Now, as my father gets older, he'll still be able to hunt with me. This will be a real comfortable place for him.

"As I said, Dad and I have been building deer stands a long time.

"Now, I finally have a place of my own where we could build something nice."

Unexpected Visitor



Helen Komes had a visitor at her home last weekend. This mountain lion was discovered peeking into her home on their ranch east of Sturgis. He was first spotted on the north side of the house and came around to the south east side and laid in the sun there for quite some time. The hunters had him spotted and called the game warden. Despite all of the morning activity, Komes said the lion did not seem scared of the people and vehicles going in and out of the yard. The warden said it was probably a young male who had been run off by the more dominate old males. (Courtesy photo)